



According to the Minnesota Department of Health breastfeeding data, Black (African American) breastfeeding rates, dropped in 2021 to 76.4%. Barriers to breastfeeding prevent some women from initiating breastfeeding and lead to early cessation for others. Infants and mothers who do not breastfeed are at higher risk for poor health outcomes. Breastmilk provides antibodies and other anti-infective properties, breastfed infants have stronger immune systems than those who are not breastfed. Breastfed infants have lower incidence of ear and respiratory infections, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), asthma, obesity, and type 2 diabetes; which all disproportionately impact African Americans. Breastfeeding is also important for maternal health and well-being. Mothers who breastfeed have a lower risk for breast, uterine and ovarian cancer, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes. Exclusively breastfeeding women report lower rates of depression than formula-feeding mothers. If 90 percent of mothers who gave birth in Minnesota breastfed exclusively for the first six months and continued to breastfeed for at least one year, an estimated 7,680 ear infections, 35,973 gastrointestinal infections, and 38 percent of child deaths could have been prevented in 2016. Among mothers, 56 cases of breast cancer, 407 cases of hypertension, 141 cases of diabetes, and 31 deaths could have been prevented. This amounts to a lifetime cost savings of \$208 million (Nursing or feeding a baby with human milk MDH, 2019).

The Chocolate Milk Club 501c3, a culturally-specific service of Chosen Vessels Midwifery Services, developed from community based action research to address the low breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates of African American women in Minneapolis. Cultural factors were found to play a significant role in African American mother's decision and capacity to breastfeed. Many desire to breastfeed but lack the knowledge and support to do so successfully. Our goal (**Vision**) is to combine the midwife model of care with the cultural tradition of mutual aide to inspire all African American women to breastfeed and support all those that do. (**Why**) Because breastfeeding plays a uniquely important role in the health, development, and survival of African American babies (infants). According to research, African American babies are twice as likely to die before their first birthday compared to white infants. And according to the CDC, breastfeeding could decrease their infant mortality rate by as much as 50%.

Therefore, breastfeeding is essential to improving survival rates and health outcomes for African American infants. So, we promote breast milk as the preferred first food for infants and encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months with continued breastfeeding up to the first year of life. (**Mission**) We strive to revive, restore and reclaim breastfeeding as the cultural norm in our community. (**How**) by providing culturally relevant education & support to African American families.

However, as we continue this important work we need additional funds to help African American families breastfeed successfully and thrive in our community.

\$250,000.00/Year would allow us to serve more families by expanding our educational programs and services as follows:

- 1) Increase city wide breastfeeding education, awareness & promotional media campaign(s) throughout the year.
- 2) Expand our home visiting program with breastfeeding peer educators,
- 3) Increase breastfeeding training to perinatal educators, community health workers, and birth workers.
- 4) Increase families access to consultations and care by an internationally board certified lactation consultants (IBCLC), counselors and educators.
- 5) Expand our locations and frequency of support groups and services beyond Minneapolis, extending these services to the surrounding suburbs and St. Paul location(s).
- 6) Expand our educational outreach in the community to include breastfeeding and perinatal education earlier during the prenatal period.
- 7) Continue our Milestone Celebrations to recognize those meeting their exclusive breastfeeding goals.
- 8) Initiate a warm line for breastfeeding questions and/or concerns.
- 9) Expand the Rhonda Speers-White Award to include an educational scholarship(s) to increase lactation educators, counselors and consultants of color in the workforce pipeline.

The Chocolate Milk Club believes that good health begins with breastfeeding and that breastfeeding is an underutilized tool in addressing Black infant and maternal health disparities.

Respectfully,

Dr. LaVonne Moore, DNP, APRN, FACNM, WHCNP-BC, IBCLC
CEO and Founder
Chosen Vessels Midwifery Services and Chocolate Milk Club
Email: chosenvesselsmidwife@outlook.com
C: (612) 850-0016
Breast is Best!